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Simple Solutions to Sewing Machine Problems

Carolyn Joyner

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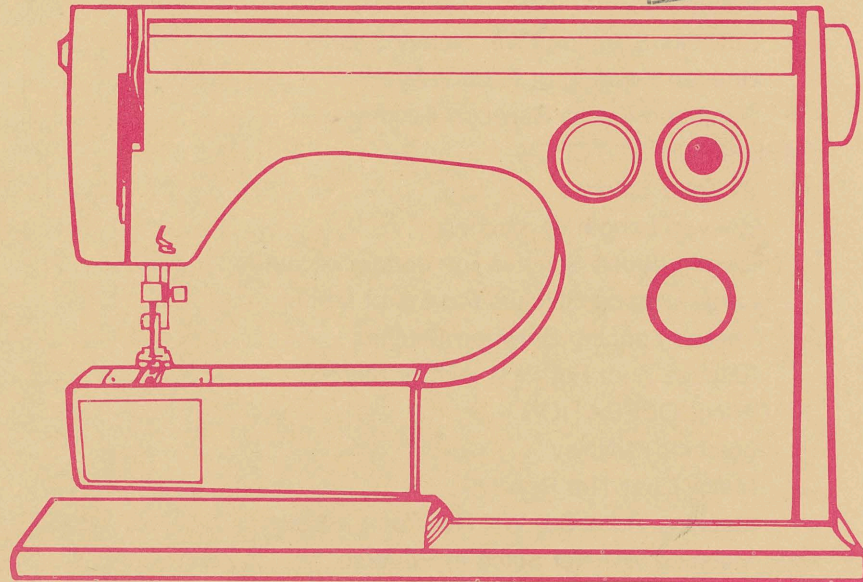
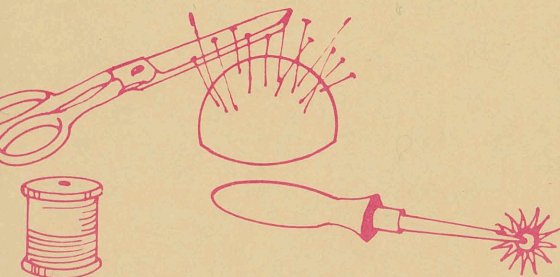
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Simple Solutions to Sewing Machine Problems

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SEW EASY — SIMPLE SOLUTIONS TO SEWING MACHINE PROBLEMS

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SEW EASY — SIMPLE SOLUTIONS TO SEWING MACHINE PROBLEMS

The sewing machine, a precision-built piece of equipment, can be an expensive investment. It is well worth the time spent to become thoroughly familiar with your machine.

DEVELOP YOUR MACHINE KNOWLEDGE

The majority of expensive service calls on sewing machines could be avoided by taking proper care of the machine.

Each sewing machine is different. Understanding of your individual machine is gained from reading the machine

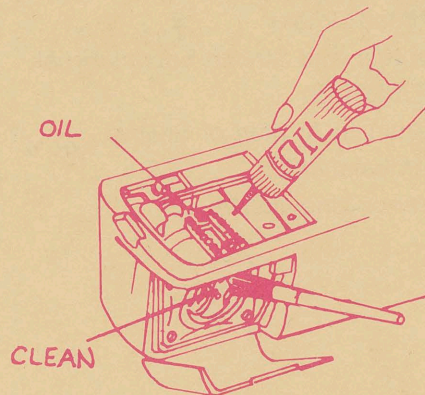


manual, attending sewing classes offered at the time of purchase, and becoming experienced in the machine's operation. Proper care is essential in order to get many

years of faithful performance and service from your machine. (Refer to Extension bulletin #781, "There's No Machine Magic.")

CLEAN AND OIL THE MACHINE

When a problem occurs, *CLEAN THE MACHINE AND CHECK THE NEEDLE BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO DO ANY ADJUSTMENTS OR REPAIRS YOURSELF*. A sewing machine must be cleaned and oiled to operate



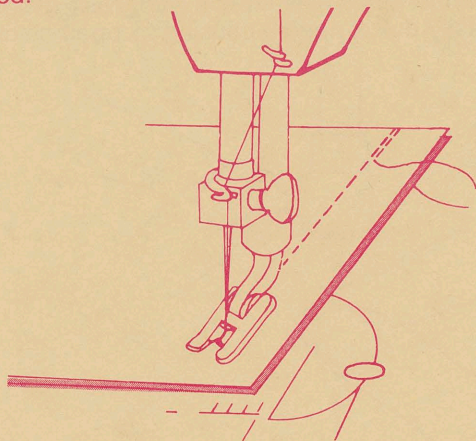
properly. Use a small brush to remove any lint or grit.

It is best to oil the machine before each eight hours of use. Always use sewing machine oil. Do not over oil — one drop is sufficient when done regularly.

NOTE: REFER TO YOUR MACHINE MANUAL; SOME MACHINES DO NOT REQUIRE OILING.

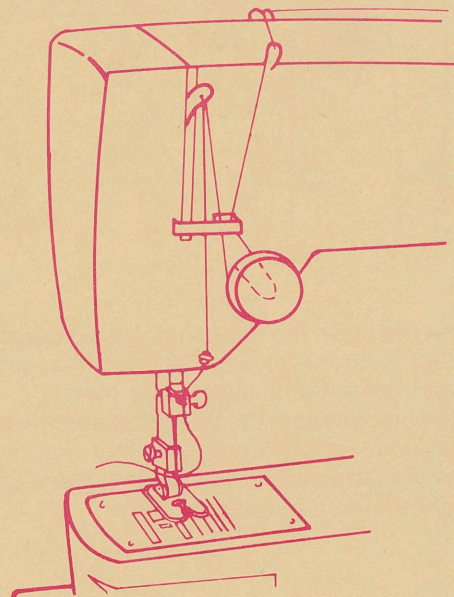
STITCH A TEST SEAM

Test machine stitches on a sample of the fabric to be used for each garment. When testing, use the same number of layers and type of fabric to be used in the garment, including interfacing. Any stitching (such as topstitching) to be done on an enclosed seam should also be tested.

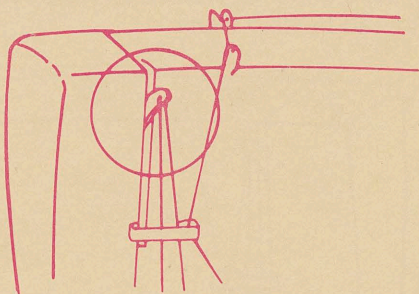


TIPS FOR BEGINNERS (AND SEASONED SEWERS!)

Thread the sewing machine by holding the spool of thread with your right hand as the thread is fed with your left hand through the thread guides, between the tension discs, and down to the needle. The needle should be threaded with the presser foot raised to avoid excess pressure on the thread tension discs.

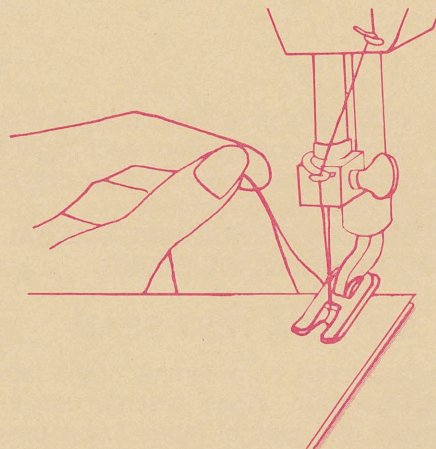


Always use an empty bobbin to begin bobbin winding. This aids in even thread distribution. Follow instructions in your manual to insert the bobbin into the bobbin case. Do not hold the bobbin. It should move freely inside the case until the thread is pulled underneath the tension spring. Begin and end stitching with the thread take-up lever near its highest position.

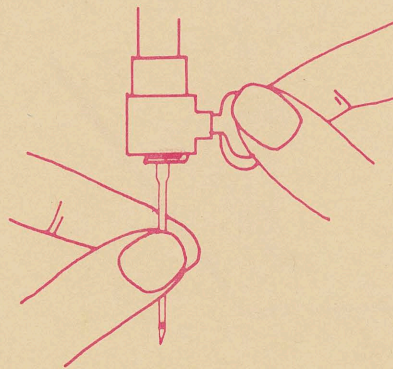


Place the needle in the fabric before you begin stitching. Stitch for $\frac{3}{8}$ inch and reverse stitches. Resume forward stitching and guide fabric slowly and evenly.

End stitching by raising the thread take-up lever near the highest position. Raise the presser foot and move fabric diagonally to the rear of the machine to cut thread. Leave at least 3 inches of thread ends.



Change the machine needle according to recommendations in your sewing machine manual. When sewing synthetics it is best to use a new needle with every garment. Synthetics easily dull a needle causing skipped stitches.



WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

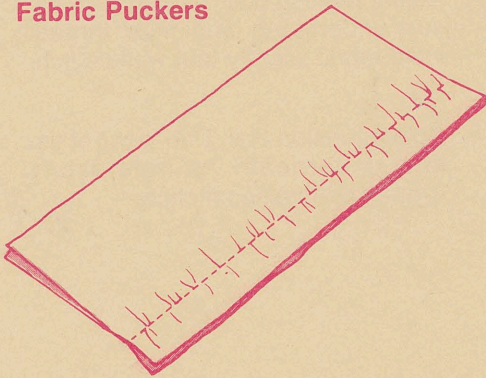
Many sewing machine problems can easily be solved at home by becoming familiar with the causes and knowing a few simple solutions.

Each fabric performs differently. Needle, thread, pressure, and tension should be regulated and tested on fabric swatches to produce evenly spaced, balanced stitches.

FABRIC PROBLEMS

PROBLEM

Fabric Puckers



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Upper tension too tight

Lower tension too tight

Bobbin wound unevenly

Thread too coarse for fabric

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Adjust tension dial

Refer to machine manual and adjust bobbin tension screw

Wind bobbin evenly at medium speed; avoid spurts.

Use finer thread

PROBLEM

Fabric Puckers (continued)

POSSIBLE CAUSE

Two different sizes or kinds of thread used

Stitch too long for fabric

Needle too large for fabric

Needle is dull, difficult to pierce fabric

Presser foot not holding fabric taut

Fabric is very sheer and soft. Fabric may contain little or no body.

Fabric stitched as a single layer

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Use same type and size thread on top and in bobbin

Adjust stitch length to suit fabric

Use finer needle

Replace with new needle

Refer to instructions in machine manual regarding feed and pressure

Adjust tension dial. Use layer of tissue underneath and finer thread. Hold fabric slightly taut while stitching.

Adjust tension dial. Use layer of tissue underneath or hold fabric slightly taut while stitching.

PROBLEM

Difficulty Stitching Over Heavy Seams

POSSIBLE CAUSE

Sewing too fast

Seams not properly graded

Needle is too small for fabric

Pressure may be too heavy

Foot needs to be leveled

Feed dog does not rise high enough

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Use smooth, even speed

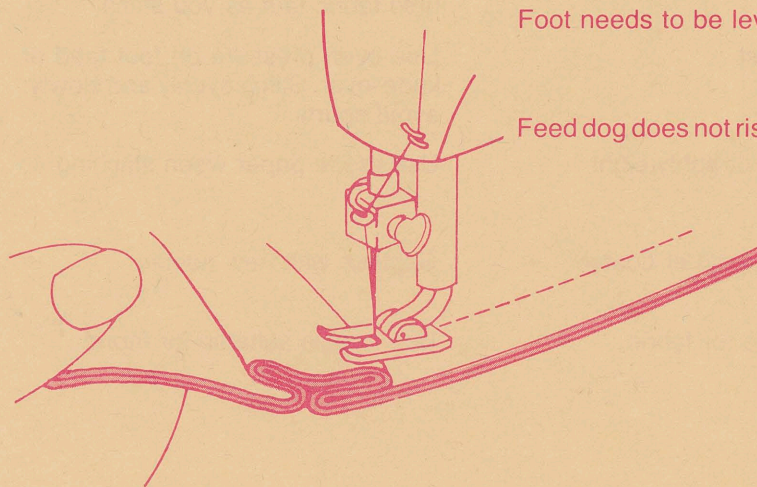
To eliminate bulk, trim and grade seams

Use larger needle

Refer to machine manual to adjust pressure

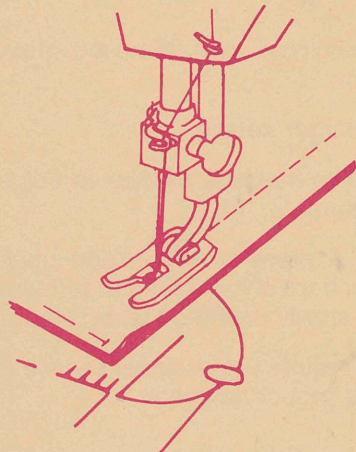
Fold a piece of fabric and place under back of foot, close to garment. Sew slowly until feed takes fabric.

May require professional service to set at proper height



PROBLEM

Uneven Feeding of Fabric Layers



Damaged Fabric Between Stitches

POSSIBLE CAUSE

Presser foot pressure too light or too heavy

Improper foot for fabric and/or project

Fabric layers not stabilized by basting or pinning

Stitching too fast

Fabric is sticky or lightweight

Needle bent, burred or coarse

Incorrect needle for fabric

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Adjust pressure to suit fabric or use an attachment to feed fabric evenly. A lightweight presser foot may eliminate problem.

Refer to machine manual to determine proper foot for task

Baste or place pins horizontally every 3-4 inches. Remove pins and hold fabric taut as you stitch.

Use even pressure on foot feed or knee lever. Stitch evenly and slowly; avoid spurts.

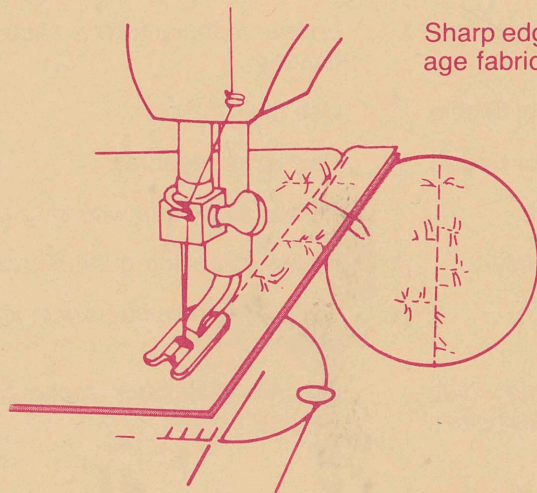
Use tissue paper when stitching.

Replace with new needle

Use needle suitable for fabric

PROBLEM

Damaged Fabric Between Stitches (continued)



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Hole in throat plate damaged

Sharp edges on feed dog may damage fabric

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Smooth with emeryboard, or replace throat plate

Smooth sharp edges with emeryboard or replace feed dog

IMPERFECT STITCHES

Skipped Stitches

Needle wrong type or size for fabric

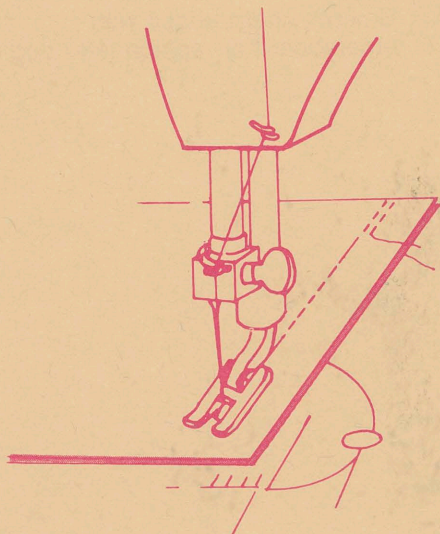
Needle dull or bent

Use ballpoint needle for knits, sharp-point for wovens, and wedge-point for leathers and vinyls.

Change needle

PROBLEM

Skipped Stitches (continued)



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Needle inserted backward or not completely up in needle clamp

Needle wrong brand for machine

Thread too coarse for size of needle

Eye of needle too small for thread

Needle threaded incorrectly

Machine threaded incorrectly

Oil on needle

Needle clogged with gummy substance. (May be result of sewing over adhesives.)

Lint or fabric sizing on needle. (Fabric may have finish which prevents good stitch formation.)

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Refer to manual for correct placement. Thread from side with long groove.

Follow manufacturer's recommendations

Use finer thread

Use larger needle

Thread from side with long groove

Follow threading guide in manual

Sew over scrap fabric with machine unthreaded

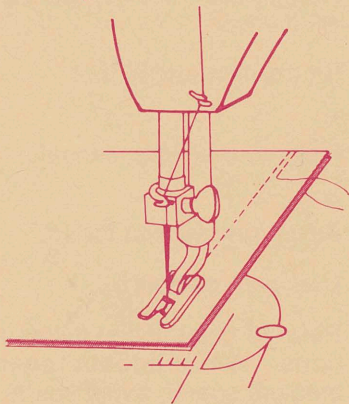
Clean with rubbing alcohol or change needle

Clean with rubbing alcohol or change needle. (Wash fabric before cutting out garment.)

PROBLEM	POSSIBLE CAUSE	PROBABLE SOLUTION
Skipped Stitches (continued)	Hole in throat plate too large	Use straight stitch throat plate and straight stitch foot or put needle in left position
	Zipper foot not close enough to needle	Re-position zipper foot
	Incorrect foot for particular sewing task	Refer to machine manual
	Pressure too light	Adjust pressure to fabric
	Sewing in spurts	Use even pressure
Uneven Length of Stitches	Bobbin wound unevenly or too full	Refer to manual and follow instructions. Wind bobbin evenly at medium speed; avoid spurts.
	Improper threading	Follow threading guide in manual
	Thread is too thick for needle	Use a finer thread
	Pushing or pulling fabric while stitching	Guide fabric slowly and evenly

PROBLEM

Uneven Length of Stitches (continued)



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Bobbin wound unevenly

Presser foot too loose

Lint between teeth of feed dog

Loose upper tension

PROBABLE SOLUTION

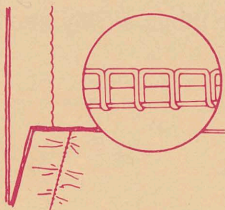
Follow instructions in manual. Wind bobbin evenly at medium speed; avoid spurts.

Tighten presser foot clamp

Use a brush to clean out lint

Adjust tension dial

Large Looped Stitches (on bottom of fabric)



Upper tension too loose. (Bobbin thread lies parallel to fabric.)

Machine threaded incorrectly. (Thread failed to pass between two tension discs.)

Bobbin case not in correctly

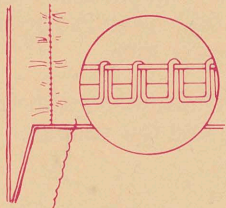
Adjust upper tension to a larger number

Follow threading guide in manual. Raise presser foot before threading to allow thread to pass between tension discs.

Refer to instructions in machine manual for correct placement.

PROBLEM

Large Looped Stitches (on top of fabric)



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Bobbin tension too loose

Upper tension too tight

Machine threaded incorrectly

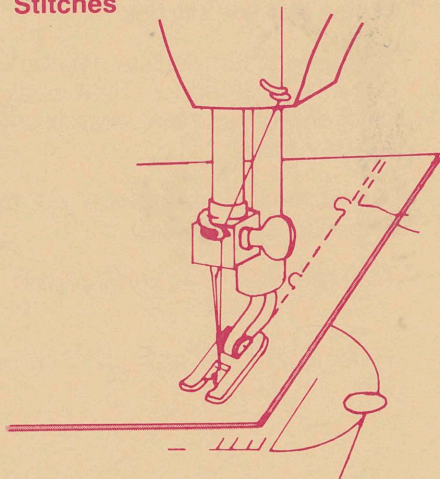
PROBABLE SOLUTION

Adjust bobbin tension screw so that top and bottom stitches balance

Adjust upper tension to a smaller number

Consult threading guide in machine manual

Thread Looping Between Stitches



Machine threaded incorrectly

Bobbin placed incorrectly in bobbin case

Tensions unbalanced

Upper thread not placed between tension discs

Pieces of thread or lint between tension discs or in bobbin area

Timing needs adjusting

Follow threading guide in machine manual

Refer to instructions in manual for correct placement

Refer to instructions in manual

Follow threading guide in manual. (Raise presser foot before threading to allow thread to pass between tension discs.)

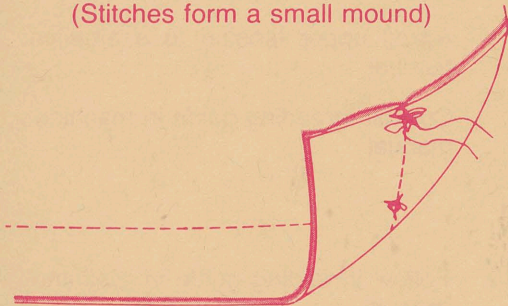
Use a brush to remove lint or tweezers to remove pieces of thread

May require professional service

PROBLEM

Stitches Knot For First Inch or More

(Stitches form a small mound)



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Failure to pull thread through hole in throat plate before stitching

Both threads not held behind presser foot or drawn diagonally to rear of presser foot before beginning stitching

Full power not given immediately.
(Stitches piled on top of each other)

Use of wrong throat plate

Tension not balanced

Spring on upper tension not properly adjusted

Use of wrong presser foot

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Raise presser foot. Lower threaded needle and pull loop of bobbin thread through hole in throat plate. Draw both threads diagonally to rear of presser foot.

Hold thread ends with fingers while taking first few stitches

Place needle in fabric before lowering presser foot to relieve pressure on the first few stitches

All-purpose throat plate may be too large for fine fabrics. (Use straight stitch throat plate and straight stitch presser foot.)

Adjust tension so that top and bottom stitches balance

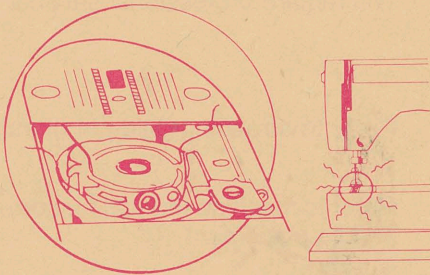
May require professional repair

Refer to machine manual for correct foot

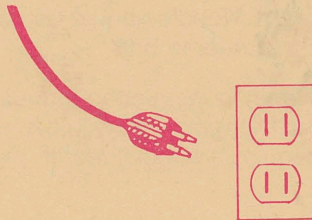
MACHINE OPERATION

PROBLEM

Machine Is Noisy



Motor Does Not Run



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Machine needs cleaning and oiling

Loose bearings

Shuttle or bobbin case loose

Needle bent and hitting against metal

Machine out of time

Not connected to live electrical outlet

Cord is not plugged in wall or on side of machine

Main power turned off

Wall switch which controls electrical outlet is turned off

Check for damaged cord

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Follow manufacturer's instructions

Requires professional service

Refer to instruction manual for adjustment. May require professional service.

Replace with new needle

Requires professional help

Check outlet to determine if in working order. (Test with another appliance)

Check cord connection in both locations

Check fuse box

Turn on wall switch which controls electrical outlet

Replace cord or have it repaired

PROBLEM

Motor Does Not Run (continued)

POSSIBLE CAUSE

Turn hand wheel. If machine runs only for a while, new brushes are needed.

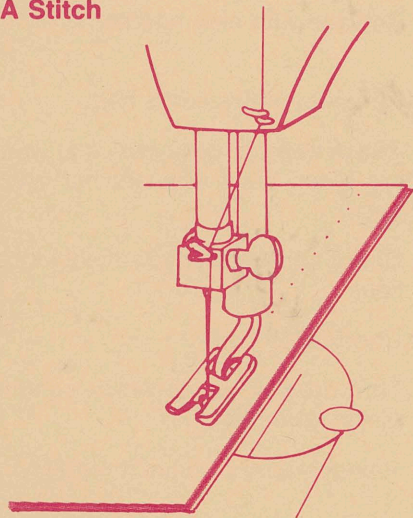
NOTE: If none of the above are a problem, the machine may have a loose or broken wire.

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Do Not operate machine under this condition; to use may damage motor beyond repair. Have brushes replaced immediately.

Will require professional service.

Machine Runs But Will Not Form A Stitch



Needle threaded from wrong direction

Needle in backward

Needle bent

Needle too low in needle clamp

Needle wrong length

Refer to threading guide in manual

Refer to machine manual for correct needle placement

Replace with new needle

Refer to manual for correct placement. Needle should be completely up in needle bar.

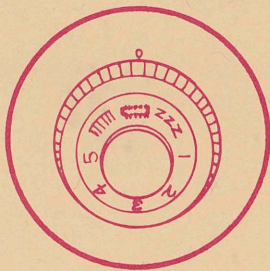
Refer to instruction manual for correct length. (Many older machines require a special length.)

PROBLEM

Machine Runs But Will Not Form A Stitch

(continued)

Machine Will Not Stitch In Reverse



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Needle unthreaded

Machine threaded incorrectly

Bobbin is empty

Clutch knob not tightened after winding bobbin

May be older model machine without this feature

Stitch control may be set on "stretch stitch" or "buttonhole"

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Follow threading guide in machine manual

Refer to threading guide in machine manual

Refill bobbin with the same type thread used on spool pin

Tighten clutch knob using a clockwise motion

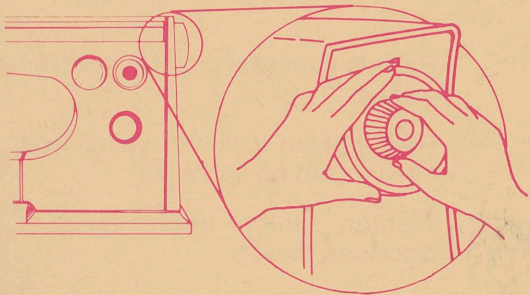
Refer to instruction manual to determine machine capability

Adjust for reverse stitching

PROBLEM

Machine Locks

(motor runs — machine does not)



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Thread caught in bobbin case

Motor belt slipping

Machine still set for bobbin winding

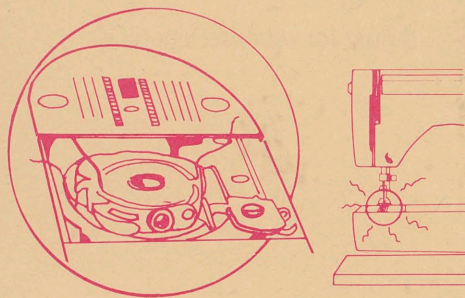
PROBABLE SOLUTION

Remove with tweezers or use a backward motion on handwheel to break or cut jammed threads. Remove all pieces of thread.

Belt is loose or worn. May require professional service

Tighten wheel and adjust machine for stitching. Follow manufacturers instructions.

Machine Runs “Hard”



Machine needs cleaning and oiling

Bobbin winder against belt or wheel while stitching

Thread jammed in bobbin case

Follow instructions in manual

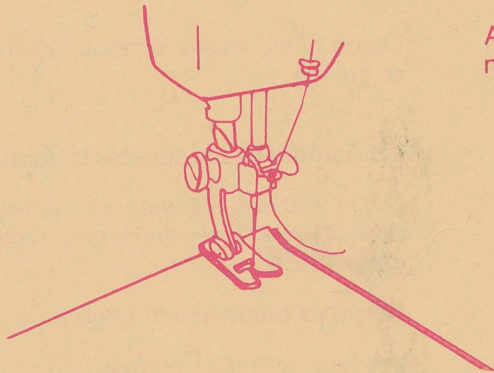
Disengage bobbin winder

Remove thread with tweezers. Use brush to remove lint.

NEEDLE PROBLEMS

PROBLEM

Needle Comes Unthreaded



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Thread take-up lever not in highest position

Amount of thread through eye of needle too short

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Begin and end stitching with thread take-up lever near highest position

Pull about 6 inches of thread through eye of needle when threading.

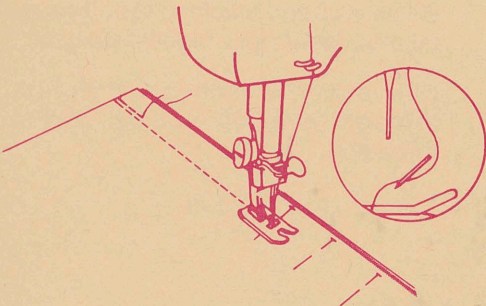
Needle Breaks

Sewing over pins

Use a moveable presser foot, finer pins, or remove pins before stitching over them. (Stitching over pins may also distort stitches.)

PROBLEM

Needle Breaks (continued)



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Needle not secured properly or too loose

Needle inserted incorrectly

Pushing or pulling fabric while stitching, causing needle to hit throat plate

Needle too fine for fabric

Failure to raise needle before removing fabric

Needle bar out of line

Machine needle is bent

Crossing a thick seam with too small a needle

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Refer to machine manual. Tighten new needle securely in needle clamp.

Refer to manual for correct placement

Guide fabric slowly without pushing or pulling

Use larger needle, suitable for fabric

Begin and end stitching with thread take-up lever and needle near highest position

Requires professional service

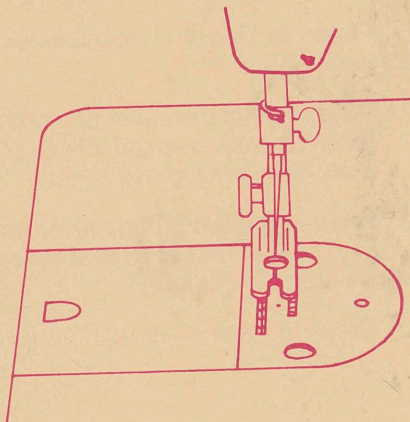
Replace with new needle

Eliminate bulk in seams by grading or layering fabric

PROBLEM

Needle Breaks (continued)

Needle Moves Up And Down While Winding Bobbin



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Bobbin case inserted incorrectly

Presser foot loose or attached incorrectly

Upper tension too tight

Clutch knob not disengaged

Hand wheel bearing needs oiling or replacing

NOTE: If the problem cannot be located, it will not harm machine if needle is unthreaded and not damaged.

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Refer to manual for correct placement

Refer to manual and tighten presser foot screw

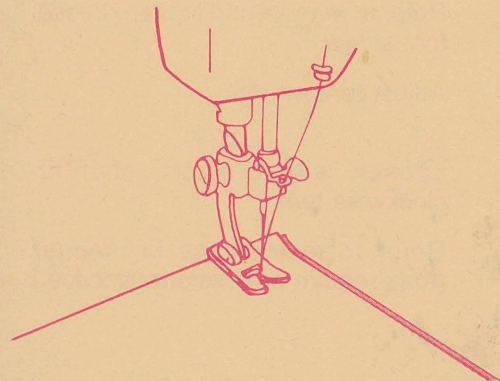
Adjust tension dial

Loosen with a short, counter-clockwise turn

Refer to instructions in manual. (May require professional service.)

PROBLEM

Needle Moves But Fabric Will Not Feed



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Pressure too light

Pressure dial at "zero" or feed in "darn" position

Stitch length set at "zero" or very short stitch length

Presser foot not lowered

Fabric not gripped completely by feed dog

Fabric pushed into needle hole by use of wide stitch throat plate

Thread knotted under fabric

Feed dog lowered

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Adjust pressure to suit fabric

Refer to instruction manual. Adjust pressure regulator.

Adjust stitch length to suit fabric

Place needle in fabric and lower presser foot before beginning to stitch

Refer to machine manual for adjustment

Hold ends of thread at beginning of stitch or use straight stitch throat plate and straight stitch foot

Place needle in fabric before lowering presser foot to relieve pressure on first few stitches

Refer to instruction manual for adjustment

PROBLEM

Needle Moves But Fabric Will Not Feed
(continued)

POSSIBLE CAUSE

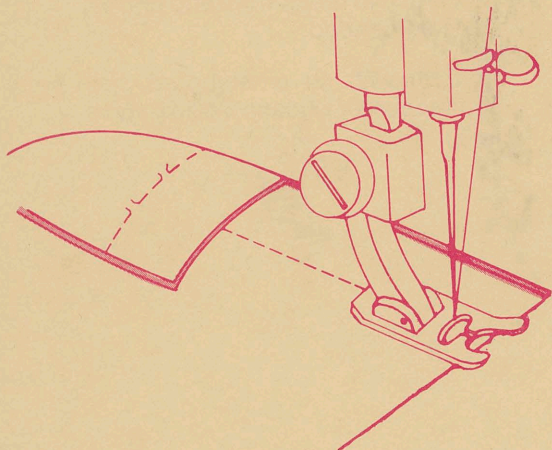
Feed dog worn smooth

PROBABLE SOLUTION

May require professional service for replacement

THREAD BREAKAGE

Bobbin Thread Breaks



Thread dry, rotten, or of poor quality

Knot in bobbin thread

Bobbin case threaded incorrectly

Bobbin case inserted incorrectly

Bobbin wound too loosely or too tightly

Replace with new thread or different brand

Clip and remove knotted area, or replace with thread of better quality

Follow instructions in manual

Follow instructions in manual

Wind bobbin evenly at medium speed; avoid spurts.

PROBLEM

Bobbin Thread Breaks (continued)

POSSIBLE CAUSE

Bobbin wound too full

Bobbin or bobbin case damaged

Bobbin tension too tight

Rough or sharp edges on lower tension spring

Lint or dirt packed in bobbin case.
Bobbin cannot turn freely.

Blunt or sharp edges on throat plate

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Wind bobbin evenly at medium speed; avoid spurts.

Smooth with emeryboard, fine sandpaper or replace if badly damaged

Refer to machine manual and adjust bobbin tension screw

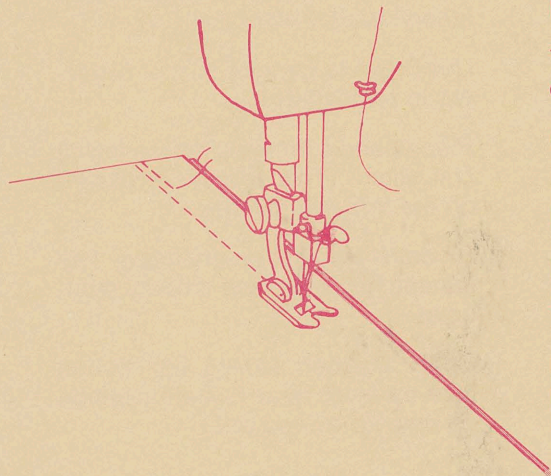
May require professional service

Use brush to remove lint and dirt. Oil if recommended.

Smooth with an emeryboard, fine sandpaper, or replace if badly damaged

PROBLEM

Upper Thread Breaks



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Machine needs cleaning

Machine threaded incorrectly

Thread is knotty, rotten, or of poor quality

Needle inserted incorrectly

Needle bent or blunt

Needle too fine for thread

Thread too coarse for needle

Needle rubs presser foot or throat plate

Upper tension too tight

Thread wrapped around spool pin under spool

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Follow manufacturer's instructions

Follow threading guide in manual

Replace with new thread or different brand

Refer to manual for correct needle placement

Replace with new needle

Use larger needle

Use finer thread

Needle is bent; replace with new needle. Needle bar may need adjustment. Seek professional service.

Adjust tension dial

Use medium speed on foot feed or knee lever to insure even flow of thread

PROBLEM

Upper Thread Breaks (continued)

POSSIBLE CAUSE

Thread caught in slot on rim of spool

Lint or thread ends around bobbin case

Stitching too fast at beginning of seam

Rough or sharp places on bobbin case, hook or hole in needle plate

Thread take-up lever in wrong position

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Place spool on spool pin with slot at top. File rough edge with emeryboard if necessary.

Use brush to remove dust or tweezers to remove thread.

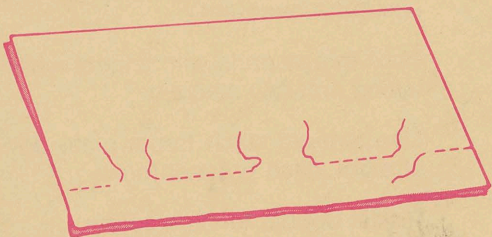
Place needle in fabric before taking first stitch. (This relieves pressure on the first few stitches.)

Smooth with an emeryboard, fine sandpaper or replace if badly damaged

Begin and end sewing with thread take-up lever near highest position on upward movement.

PROBLEM

Seams of Knit And Stretch Fabrics Break



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Wrong type of thread

Wrong type of stitch

Fabric "gives"; thread does not

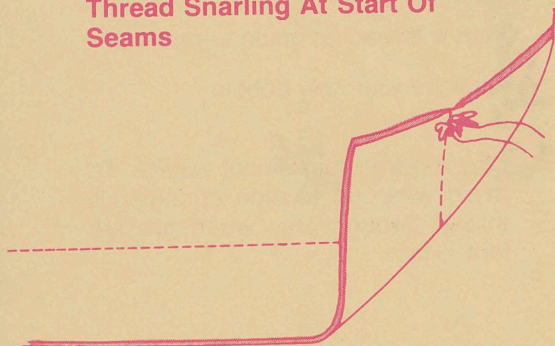
PROBABLE SOLUTION

Fabric needs compatible thread

Refer to instructions in machine manual for stretch stitches

Hold fabric slightly taut when sewing **without** stretch stitch; avoid pulling. (A looser stitch may also help.)

Thread Snarling At Start Of Seams



THREAD PROBLEMS

Machine improperly threaded

Top thread caught in bobbin

Threads not pulled diagonally to rear of presser foot before beginning seam

Needle not placed in fabric before lowering presser foot

Follow threading guide in manual

Pull bobbin thread through needle hole in throat plate before stitching

Place both threads under presser foot and draw diagonally to rear of presser foot before stitching seam

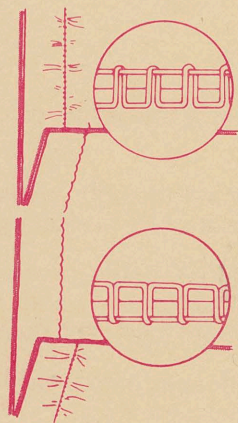
Place needle in fabric before lowering presser foot and beginning to stitch. (This relieves pressure on first few stitches.)

PROBLEM

Thread Snarling At Start Of Seams

(continued)

Tension Unbalanced



POSSIBLE CAUSE

Thread take-up lever not at highest point

Thread ends not held while taking first few stitches

Hole in all-purpose throat plate too large for fine fabrics

Lower tension unbalanced

Upper tension unbalanced

Machine threaded with presser foot lowered

Machine threaded incorrectly

Bobbin in poor condition, bent, chipped or scratched

Tension spring may be worn or loose

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Begin and end stitching with thread take-up lever near highest point on upward movement

Hold thread ends with fingers while taking first few stitches

Use straight stitch throat plate and straight stitch presser foot.

Adjust bobbin tension screw

Adjust tension dial

Raise presser foot to thread machine

Follow threading guide in manual

Replace with new bobbin

May require professional service. To avoid wear on tension spring, pull thread through only when presser foot is up.

PROBLEM

Tension Unbalanced (continued)

Bobbin Winds Unevenly



CORRECT



INCORRECT

POSSIBLE CAUSE

Inferior thread (uneven, frayed, twisted)

Holding upper thread too tightly while raising thread

Thread guide for bobbin winder may need adjusting

Bobbin spindle not in “winding” position

Machine threaded improperly

Worn rubber friction ring

Bobbin being wound too fast

Bobbin wound over thread already on bobbin

PROBABLE SOLUTION

Replace with new thread or change brands

Hold upper thread loosely with index finger on throat plate while raising bobbin thread.

Refer to machine manual

Refer to machine manual for correct position

Follow threading guide in manual

Replace

Wind bobbin evenly at medium speed; avoid spurts.

Use empty bobbin for even winding of thread

NOTE: For information pertaining to a specific sewing machine model refer to the instruction book or manual which comes with the machine.

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